

THE
BINDER'S
ART

THOMAS FISHER
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Case (1) The books in this exhibition have been chosen to illustrate the history of bookbinding in Europe from the late 15th century to the present. The focus has been on changing styles of decoration and the way in which they relate to contemporary taste. The examples come mainly from Britain, France, and Italy. The European art of bookbinding, however, had its origins in the countries of the Near East and North Africa. The oldest surviving leather bindings come from a Coptic monastery in Egypt and date from the 5th to 10th centuries. The techniques of tooling leather and applying gold to it were developed in the Islamic countries, and goatskin, the most popular material for fine bindings, is still called morocco.

The earliest writing was on tablets or on single pieces of papyrus or parchment, sometimes fastened together; later the scroll evolved. Some of these forms of the book are still used in Eastern cultures, but by the 4th century A.D. the codex, or book made of rectangular folded sheets, was the predominant form in Europe. The treasured manuscripts of the Middle Ages were frequently enclosed in covers of gold or silver set with precious stones, enamel work, or ivory — examples of the jeweler's, rather than the bookbinder's art. But decorated leather bindings, apparently based on Coptic techniques, were known in Europe as early as the 7th century. These romanesque bindings were frequently of deerskin and were stamped with small tools depicting animals and flowers sometimes applied in a random pattern.

(2) The invention of printing in the second half of the 15th century gave a tremendous impetus to the development of bookbinding in Europe, and new methods were developed to decorate the greatly increased number of books. While morocco leather and the techniques of gold tooling had been introduced into Italy through Naples and Venice by the end of the 15th century and were known in Moorish Spain even earlier, the characteristic bindings of northern Europe until well into the 17th century were of calf or natural pigskin stamped or tooled "blind," that is without the use of gold. The earliest of these bindings had covers of wood rather than paper board, and sometimes the leather covered the spine only leaving the wood exposed. Panel stamps large enough to decorate the whole cover of a small book and rolls which produced a continuous pattern were introduced to speed up the decoration of bindings. Many of the tools and stamps were pictorial; popular subjects included scenes

from classical mythology and the Bible, allegorical figures, the lives of saints, and historical or contemporary figures such as the Protestant Reformers. Clasps were frequently used on books of this type, and the more elaborate bindings might also have engraved metal bosses and corner pieces.

From Italy the use of morocco and of gold-tooling techniques spread to France in the early 16th century and to England by the 17th century. Under the patronage of François I and other great French book collectors, most notably Jean Grolier, the Parisian binders quickly became the most creative and influential, a position they have maintained into the 20th century.

(3-5) The practice of a binder "signing" his work did not become common until the 19th century, and the imprint can provide only general clues as to the place and date of the binding. But through the study of historical sources and the comparison of the designs and the individual tools used on particular bindings, the characteristic styles of different periods and countries have been distinguished. It has even been possible to identify the work of individual binders, though this is always tentative as the work of the best binders was widely imitated. Some examples of prevailing styles from the 17th and 18th centuries, particularly in England and France, are shown in exhibition cases 3 to 5.

Variations of the fan binding with its lacy circular pattern in the centre and matching quarter-circle corner pieces were common throughout Europe. The style known as "Le Gascon" takes its name from a binder working in the reigns of Louis XIII and XIV and is characterized by the use of pointillé tools, which produce a dotted rather than a solid line. Other styles take their name from a distinctive tool, such as the "drawer-handle," a curved tool widely used in 17th century England, or from the distinctive shape of the basic design as in the English "cottage roof" or the Scottish "herringbone" bindings. Patrons might influence the style of bindings done for them either by having their monograms or arms incorporated into the design, or, as in the case of Thomas Hollis, by choosing tools to represent their personal taste or political ideals.

With the new influences in architecture and decoration in the 18th century, new styles in binding also began to appear. Festoons, wreaths, urns, and other motifs associated with the name of the architect Robert Adam were used to decorate late 18th century British bindings. "Chinoiserie" and Chippendale styles in furniture have their parallels in binding design. While morocco was still used for the best bindings, calf was a popular material in this period. Frequently it was stained or patterned; one technique called "tree calf" involved staining the leather with acid to produce a tree shape on each cover. Other patterns resemble the techniques of wood inlay in furniture. Perhaps because of the increasing size of private libraries, more and more attention was paid to the spine; the covers might be left relatively plain while the

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spine was fully tooled and, in the case of calf bindings, frequently decorated with coloured morocco labels.

(6-7) Early printed books frequently had binding decorations which were completely unrelated to the subject of the book. But in the 18th century we begin to see the use of religious and other tools which reflect the text. In the 19th century these thematic tools were very popular. Influenced by the antiquarian tastes of book collectors, the binders of the mid 1800's also turned to the past for inspiration and recreated styles from earlier periods. They established the modern custom of suiting the binding style to the date of the book it contained. The best bindings from England and France in this period are distinguished by their very rich and polished appearance and by the use of heavy gold, particularly on page edges, and watered silk and other luxurious materials for the endpapers. The fore-edge painting, a miniature painting on the fanned-out edges of the leaves which disappeared when the book was closed, might add further to the richness of the binding.

(8) While some binders continued to work in these traditional ways, the arts and crafts movement in the late 19th century in England and the ideals of William Morris had a strong influence on binding. There was a new emphasis on honest construction even if it meant a less polished appearance. Patterns were less heavily gilt or were tooled blind, and more original designs were created. From the Doves Bindery established by Thomas Cobden-Sanderson in 1893 came a new generation of binders who carried on these ideas, most notably Douglas Cockerell (1870-1945), who was widely influential as a binder and a teacher.

In France the revival of fine printing and the édition de luxe with its original illustrations by leading artists also inspired more creative bindings. From the early 20th-century French binders came a new concept: the cover seen as a single unit for design rather than as two covers separated by a spine. While British binders have kept the tradition of artist-craftsman, in France the designs of artists like Paul Bonet may be executed by someone else. The best work of the 20th century is distinguished by its creativity and originality. Some binders use the traditional techniques of leather onlay and gilt lines to reproduce abstract or freeform designs, while others experiment with materials such as ceramics and metals, or introduce sculptured or other three-dimensional effects. The book itself, its subject, design or illustrations, provides the basic inspiration, and the original creative impulse which began with the writer is completed by the binder's art.



The finishing tools on display throughout the exhibition are from the Birdsall Collection, originally in the possession of the firm of Birdsall of Northampton. Some examples of the work of this firm are shown in case 7. Impressions from some of the tools have been reproduced in this guide.



In preparing this exhibition I am much indebted to the fine catalogue, The History of Bookbinding, 525-1950 A.D., published by the Walters Art Gallery of Baltimore in 1957.

Elizabeth Hulse





The Origins

1. The scroll:

Bible. Manuscripts, Hebrew. O.T. Esther. [The Book of Esther.
ca. 1850]

2. Two ola books from Ceylon:

[Medical handbook. ca. 1620-50]

[Sinhalese handbook of treatment, especially of skin diseases.
ca. 1720]

3. The codex:

Bible. Codices. [The four Gospels in Greek] "Codex Torontonensis"

4. A lacquered binding:

Mahābhārata. Bhagavadgītā. Sanskrit. [Bhagavadgītā. Kashmir,
ca. 1850]

5. Koran with tooled leather carrying case:

Koran. Manuscripts, Arabic. [Koran. 1278 A.H./1861-62]

6. A Turkish binding:

[Diary of a journey from Damascus to Istanbul. Turkish. 1182,
i.e. 1768]

7. An early Italian binding:

Melchiorre, da Parma. Dialogo de lamina. [Bologna, 1538]

15th - 16th Centuries

Blind tooled calf and pigskin bindings:

1. Natalibus, Petrus de, Bp. of Equilio. Catalogus sanctorum & gestoy eoꝝ ex diuersis voluminibus collectus. Lugduni [1508]
Blind tooled pigskin with wooden boards.
3. Gritsch, Johannes. Quadragesimale. [Lyons, 1490]
Calf binding with brass bosses and clasps.
4. Suetonius Tranquillus, C. XII Caesares. Basilae, 1560.
Binding with figures from the Judgement of Paris.
5. Barbosa, Agostinho, Bp. Collectanea doctorvm, qui suis in operibus Concilij Tridentini loca referentes. Lvgdvni, 1642.
Pigskin binding with blind tooling and black stamps.
6. Rüff, Jakob. Ein schön lustig Trostbüchle von den Empfengknussen vnd Geburten der Menschen. Zürich, 1569.
Pigskin binding with biblical scenes and portraits of the Reformers.
7. Aristoteles. Ethicorvm ad Nicomachvm libri decem. Lipsiae, 1590.
Pigskin binding with the allegorical figures of Justice (front cover) and Fortune (back cover).
8. Vitruvius. De architectura. [Florence? 1523?]
Calf binding depicting St. John the Baptist and St. Michael the Archangel. From the Stillman Drake collection.
9. Platina, Bartolomeo. De vitis ac gestis svmmorvm pontificum, ad sua usq; tempora, liber vnus. [Coloniae] 1540.
Calf binding with painted edges. The portraits of the four popes are attributed to Cesare Vecellio.

A piece of a vellum manuscript used for a binding:

2. Capalla, Giovanni Maria. Scintille della fiamma innoxia. Bologna, 1569.



17th Century

1. Italian binding with Aldine-style tooling:

Malipiero, Girolamo. Il Petrarca spirituale. [Venetia, 1545]

2. Early 17th century English binding:

Martialis, Marcus Valerius. Epigrammaton libri XIII. [Venetiis, 1521]

3. A doctoral diploma from Padua:

Padua. Univerità. [Doctor's degree granted to Marcus Antonius Remena] Padue, 1671.

4. Two examples of painted strapwork:

Catholic Church. Liturgy and Ritual. [Processional] Procession-
arvm sac. Ord. praed. Romae, 1679. 2 copies.

5. 17th century Italian binding:

Tasso, Torquato. La Gervsalemm liberata. Genova, 1617.

"Le Gascon" style bindings from France:

6. Plutarch. Les Oeuvres morales et meslees de Plutarque. Paris, 1574.

7. Camus, Jean Pierre, Bp. L'Amphithéâtre sanglant. Paris, 1630.

8. 17th century French binding with owner's monogram and coronet:

Ariosto, Lodovico. Le divin Arioste. Paris, 1625.

9. A "drawer-handle" binding from England:

Blake, William, housekeeper to the Ladies Charity School,
Highgate. The Ladies Charity School-house Roll of High-
gate. [London? 1670?]



18th Century

1. A binding with religious motifs from England:

Bible. English. Authorized. 1768. The Holy Bible.
Oxford, 1768.

Some characteristic English bindings:

2. Church of England. Book of Common Prayer. French. La
Liturgie. Londres, 1739.

3. [Wharton, Philip Wharton, Duke of] The True Briton. London,
1723.

4. Reflexions on Man, and his Relation to Other Beings. London,
1733.

5. A religious binding from Italy:

Catholic Church. Liturgy and Ritual. Holy Week Offices.
Uffizio della Settimana santa e dell'Ottava di Pasqua.
Roma, 1744.

6. An English panel binding:

Church of England. Book of Common Prayer. The Book of
Common Prayer. London, 1729.

Two "cottage roof" bindings:

7. Church of England. Book of Common Prayer. The Book of Common Prayer. London, 1691.

8. Lake, Edward. Officium Excharisticum. London, 1724.

9. "Dutch gilt" endpapers:

Bible. Latin. 1605. Testamenti Veteris et Novi Biblia Sacra. Hanoviae, 1605.

10. A "semé" binding:

Michelessi, Domenico. Memorie intorno alla Vita ed agli Scritti del conte Francesco Algarotti. [Venezia, 1770]



18th Century

Two bindings done for Thomas Hollis:

1. Locke, John. The Works of John Locke. Vol. 1. London, 1768.

2. Toland, John. The Life of Milton. London, 1761.

Scottish wheel bindings:

3. Bible. English. Authorized. 1744. The Holy Bible. Edinburgh, 1744-46.

4. Bible. English. Authorized. 1766. The Holy Bible. Edinburgh [1766]

Scottish herringbone bindings:

5. Bible. English. Authorized. 1752. The Holy Bible. Vol. 1. Edinburgh, 1752.

6. Bible. English. Authorized. 1774. The Holy Bible. Vol. 1. Oxford, 1774.

7. Characteristic calf bindings from late 18th century Britain:

Goguet, Antoine Yves. The Origin of Laws, Arts, and Sciences, and their Progress among the most Ancient Nations. Edinburgh, 1775.

[Montagu, Elizabeth (Robinson)] An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear. London, 1770.

[Moore, John] Edward. London, 1796.

Moore, John. A View of the Causes and Progress of the French Revolution. London, 1795.

8. A binding in the style of James Scott of Edinburgh:

Bible. English. Authorized. 1772. The Holy Bible. Edinburgh, 1772.

Two examples of patterned calf bindings:

9. Colquhoun, Joannes. Dissertatio medica inauguralis, de hydrocephalo acuto. Glasgae, 1796.

10. Kotzebue, August Friedrich Ferdinand von. Pizarro. London, 1799.

11. A binding with neo-classical motifs:

Whalley, Thomas Sedgwick. Edwy and Edilda. London, 1779.

12. A late 18th or early 19th century binding:

La Croix, Demetrius de. Connubia florum latino carmine demonstrata. Bathoniae, 1791.



19th Century

1. A group of embroidered bindings from early 19th century Italy:

Vallaperti, Giuseppe. Il Voto di Jefte. Spoleto [1800]

Mayr, Johann Simon. Le Due Duchesse. Milano [1814?]

Ciufoletti, Vincenzo. Comingio pittore. Venezia [1802?]

Farinella, Giuseppe. Attila. Milano [1814?]

Two bindings by Charles Lewis:

2. Rogers, Samuel. Poems. London, 1834.

3. Devonshire, Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of. The Passage of the Saint Gothard. London, 1803.

Two bindings in the style of Roger Payne:

4. [Byron, George Gordon Noël Byron, 6th Baron] Poems Written by Somebody. London, 1818.

5. Spence, Joseph. A Parallel, in the Manner of Plutarch. Strawberry-Hill, 1758.

Early 19th century English bindings:

6. Thomson, James. The Seasons. London, 1824.

7. Thomson, James. The Seasons. London, 1811.

8. A fore-edge painting:

Shakespeare, William. [Dramatic Works. Chiswick, 1823]

9. An Aldine-style binding by Bedford:

Bruni, Leonardo Aretino. Comedia Poliscene. [Liptzk, 1503]

10. A mosaic binding:

[Tansillo, Luigi] Stanze amorose. Venetia, 1574.

Bindings by Duru and Petit in the "Janseniste" style:

11. Jeandet, Abel. Pontus de Tyard. Paris, 1860.
 12. Le Bibliophile français. T. 5. Paris, 1870.
 13. El Cid Campeador. Cronica del muy esforcado Cavellero El Cid Rvy Diaz Campeador. Bruxelles, 1588.
14. A binding by Chatelin:
- Fénelon, François de Salignac de La Mothe, Abp. Les Aventures de Télémaque. Maestricht, 1782.



19th - 20th Centuries

1. A binding by Robert Riviere:

Byron, George Gordon Noël Byron, 6th Baron. Hours of Idleness. Newark, 1807.

2. A group of bindings by the English firms of Riviere & Son, Zaehnsdorf, and Morrell:

[Richardson, Samuel] Pamela. London, 1741-42.

Burns, Robert. Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect. Kilmarnock, 1786.

Parkman, Francis. Montcalm and Wolfe. Boston, 1885.

Napoléon I, Emperor of the French. Memoirs of the History of France during the Reign of Napoleon. London, 1823-24.

Dickens, Charles. Great Expectations. London, 1861.

3. A binding by Émile Rousselle:

Ragueneau, Paul. La Vie de la Mere Catherine de Saint Avgvstin. Paris, 1671.

4. A binding by Launder:

Skelton, Sir John. Mary Stuart. London, 1893.

5. A challenge to the skill of the binder:

Galilei, Galileo. Galileo a Madama Cristina di Lorena (1615).
[Padova, 1897] From the Stillman Drake collection.

Bindings by the firm of Birdsall of Northampton:

6. Ward, Sir Adolphus William. The Electress Sophia and the
Hanoverian Succession. London, 1903.

7. Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship
and Travels. London, 1891.

8. Walton, Izaak. The Complete Angler. London, 1836.



20th Century

1. A binding by Alice Pattinson, dated 1903:

Bible. Latin. Vulgate. 1498. Biblia Latina. Venetiis,
1498.

Two bindings by Douglas Cockerell (1870-1945), dated 1901:

2. Imitatio Christi. Venetijs, 1486.

3. Beuve de Hanstone. Libro chiamato Buouo d'Antona. Milano
[155-?]

4. A binding from the Gregynog Press Bindery:

Hartzenbusch, Juan Eugenio. The Lovers of Teruel. [Newtown,
Montgomeryshire, Wales] 1938.

5. A binding by Douglas Duncan (1902-1968), Toronto:

Gide, André Paul Guillaume. L'Immoraliste. Paris, 1925.

Bindings by Emrys Evans, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library:

6. Wilde, Oscar. Salome. London, 1920.

Designed by Douglas Duncan.

7. Maeterlinck, Maurice. Alladine et Palomides. Bruxelles, 1894.
8. Morris, William. The Life and Death of Jason. London [1915]
9. Gide, André Paul Guillaume. Corydon. Paris [1923]
10. Flaubert, Gustave. Salammbô. Paris, 1923.



